

## Legion of Decency Pledge

*Reprinted from Catholic Action (Washington, D. C.), May, 1934.*

**L**AST November, following the annual meeting of the archbishops and bishops of the United States at which was discussed at length the moral menace of motion pictures exhibited in this country and abroad, the Administrative Committee of the National Catholic Welfare Conference appointed a continuing committee of members of the American Hierarchy "to act against the growing abuses and licentiousness of the moving picture industry." This committee is composed of Their Excellencies, the Most Rev. John T. McNicholas, O. P., Archbishop of Cincinnati; the Most Rev. John J. Cantwell, Bishop of Los Angeles and San Diego; the Most Rev. Hugh C. Boyle, Bishop of Pittsburgh; and the Most Rev. John F. Noll, Bishop of Fort Wayne.

Since the November meeting, members of this committee, together with ordinaries in a number of dioceses, have taken effective steps to mobilize the Catholic laity in a campaign for wholesome motion pictures.

As a further move in their campaign the Continuing Committee has made the suggestion that there be organized throughout the various dioceses the Legion of Decency in which individual Catholics would be invited to enroll and to pledge themselves to refrain from patronizing motion pictures which offend decency and Christian morality; also to secure as many members as possible for the Legion. It was made clear that, so far as the national committee and the pledge are concerned, there are no dues or meetings connected with membership in the Legion of Decency. Any meetings of members of the Legion that are held will be called by priests and societies under the direction of the bishop of each diocese. It is also pointed out that "millions of Americans, pledging themselves individually, can rid the country of its greatest menace—the salacious motion picture."

The pledge of the Legion of Decency, as approved in its final form by the Episcopal Committee on Motion Pictures, is as follows:

"I wish to join the Legion of Decency, which condemns vile and unwholesome moving pictures. I unite with all who protest against them as a grave menace to youth, to home life, to country and to religion.

"I condemn absolutely those salacious motion pictures which, with other degrading agencies, are corrupting public morals and promoting a sex mania in our land.

"I shall do all that I can to arouse public opinion against the portrayal of vice as a normal condition of affairs, and against depicting criminals of any class as heroes and heroines, presenting their filthy philosophy of life as something acceptable to decent men and women.

"I unite with all who condemn the display of suggestive advertisements on billboards, at theater entrances and the favorable notices given to immoral motion pictures.

"Considering these evils, I hereby promise to remain away from all motion pictures except those which do not offend decency and Christian morality. I promise further to secure as many members as possible for the Legion of Decency.

"I make this protest in a spirit of self-respect, and with the conviction that the American public does not demand filthy pictures, but clean entertainment and educational features."

## **Pastorals and Statements By Some of the American Hierarchy**

**WILLIAM CARDINAL O'CONNELL**

**Archbishop of Boston**

*From an address delivered at the 55th Convention of the Massachusetts Catholic Order of Foresters, May 23, 1934.*

**I** THINK everybody is quite conscious in these days that the tree called human life or human society, human civilization or Christian civilization, is face to face today with just such dangers as threaten the forests and the trees and the plant life which make everything so beautiful to look at and produce such wonderful fruit. We are in the face of great dangers to the moral life of the people.

Do you realize that these moving pictures with their utterly filthy plots, are undermining the moral life of your children and perhaps your own selves? It is possible to be in the presence of a very menacing evil and become used to it in such a way that you think "that cannot touch me. I am

safe from that. Oh, I know it is there, but it cannot hurt me."

Don't be too sure. Just as the little bug or the borer in the bark of the tree, quiet and innocent, can sap the very life of the tree, in the same way, if you are content to allow the children with whose guardianship you are intrusted by Almighty God, to enter these gilded palaces of vice—because that really is what they become—and give them money merely for what they think is entertainment, you are permitting their faith to be sapped and endangered, the faith of these poor, dear, little innocent souls that hardly realize what is going on in front of their eyes.

But they soon get used to it. Do not imagine that these little children's minds are impervious to the influences which are being directly and methodically placed in their pathway, which ought to be a pathway of purity and innocence.

Do not imagine that these little children, God's own little ones of the flock, can go into that atmosphere again and again and again and see the scenes which, to a poor little innocent child would in the beginning mean almost nothing at all, without being eventually influenced by them. Somehow they have the instinct that they are wrong. They feel—because they have the Catholic faith in their blood that something is wrong, but they soon get used to it.

And then what? Now, listen, my dear Catholic men and women. We are not here assembled merely to amuse ourselves. These conventions are too serious for that. You are Catholics and you have the responsibility of Catholics, and you cannot be merely indifferent to these influences which are intended by plot and plan, not merely incidentally or by accident, but by plot and plan, to ruin the faith of your children and, may I add, even your own faith.

Now, that is going on in what is called the moving picture industry. It is an industry. At least we have the satisfaction of knowing that it is not an art, but an industry, and a very prosperous one it is and an exceedingly profitable one it is. Millions upon millions every year pass into the hands of these—I really do not know how to characterize them, because anyone who profits by the weaknesses of human nature is too vile for a name.

These people who are the actors and actresses on the screen, with their unutterable disregard of every decent con-

vention of life, with their three or four or five or six or seven husbands, are on the front pages. And sometimes that is about all we get in the daily paper—the picture of these queer people with the most outrageous ideas of life that one can find anywhere short of barbarism, with beautiful clothes and what might be called beautiful faces, but they are only masks.

Can any decent woman look on that sort of life as not being a horrible thing to avoid as a contagion? How can you go and sit through a performance of that kind, carried on by people of that reputation, people with an open, scandalous reputation and pour money into their laps by the millions?

Where is our Christian ideal of life? Where has it gone to? Are you to pass out of this hall and then forget all that I have said on this subject now? You cannot be called Catholic Foresters if you do. If you forget it you will have forgotten the life of the finest tree that was ever planted, and that is the tree of human life.

Now, I know for a matter of fact—because I have kept in very close touch the last year or so with all the efforts that have been made on all sides to stop this riot of rotten, disgusting play acting that is going on in the film industry. Everyone knows what Hollywood is. It is the scandal of the world. I am not saying that everybody who lives there partakes of that rottenness of life. God forbid! At any rate, the whole world knows what Hollywood means. I know there have been efforts made by high ecclesiastics and by societies whose purpose it is to keep some sort of cleanness, at least in public life. But they just jeer at them. The answer is. "We are used to all that. You can villify us as much as you like, but your people will pay in the box office." Is that true of you? Will you do that?

### DENIS CARDINAL DOUGHERTY

#### Archbishop of Philadelphia

*From the Pastoral Letter dated May 25, 1934.*

**P**ERHAPS the greatest menace to faith and morals in America today is the motion picture theater attended every week by almost seventy-seven million persons; of whom some twenty-three millions are young people less than twenty-one years of age.

A very great proportion of the screen productions deal largely with sex or crime, and present in alluring form a false philosophy of life which is rapidly debasing and corrupting the minds and hearts of our people.

The usual theme of these moving pictures is divorce, free love, marital infidelity, and the exploits of gangsters and racketeers. A vicious and insidious attack is being made on the very foundations of our Christian civilization, namely, the sacrament of marriage, the purity of womanhood, the sanctity of the home, and obedience to lawful authority.

This sinister influence is especially devastating among our children and youth. In vain shall we struggle to build Catholic schools, and in vain shall we labor to keep the minds and hearts of our boys and girls pure and unsullied, unless some adequate measure be taken to save them from this flood of filth which is now sweeping over the country. Experience has shown that one hour spent in the darkened recesses of a moving picture theater will often undo years of careful training on the part of the school, the church and the home.

Many remedies have been suggested for this evil. Appeals have been made to the film producers, and a certain amount of censorship has been in force for many years; but all have been in vain. The programs in most of the theaters have gone from bad to worse, and many of the screen productions now openly flaunt the laws of God and man. Those responsible for this condition have turned a deaf ear to all the pleas of the decent, clean minded people of our country.

The only argument likely to be heard now is that which affects the box office. We can hope for no improvement until the producers learn that it does not pay to exhibit films offensive to Christian modesty and decency.

Nothing is left for us except the boycott, and this we must put in force if we would hope to achieve success. The Catholic people of this diocese are, therefore, urged to register their united protest against immoral and indecent films by remaining away entirely from all motion picture theaters.

Long ago the Catholic Church in this country attacked the evil of intoxicating drink by urging its members to join the Total Abstinence Society. Today it again begins a campaign against a similar evil, and requests all the faithful, especially the young people, to join the Legion of Decency which is pledged to boycott the motion picture theaters.

Since a very large proportion of the present screen plays are dangerous to faith and morals, they are a proximate occasion of sin, and as such must be avoided at any cost. To stay away from them, therefore, is not merely a counsel but a positive command, binding all in conscience under pain of sin. Our Reverend Clergy are urged most earnestly to explain to their respective flocks the doctrine of the Church on this important subject.

**PATRICK CARDINAL HAYES**

**Archbishop of New York**

*From the Pastoral Letter dated July 10, 1934.*

**M**AY I call your attention to the important statement of the Catholic Bishops' Committee recently published, informing us of the very notable progress of the campaign launched by the committee "against the destructive moral influence of evil motion pictures?"

Last November at the meeting in Washington of the Bishops of the United States, His Excellency the Most Rev. Bishop of Los Angeles presented an exhaustive report on the vastness of the motion picture industry, its almost universal appeal to the people, its dangerous power, and its abuse of opportunity by production of lustful and depraved pictures. A Committee of the Hierarchy made up of Their Excellencies the Archbishop of Cincinnati, the Bishop of Los Angeles, the Bishop of Pittsburgh and the Bishop of Fort Wayne, has been very active, even conferring with representatives of the largest producers in the country.

It is most heartening to all who would have our beloved land stand high on the better, nobler and cleaner plane of life to observe the widespread awakening throughout the country to the evil character and shocking debasement of many motion pictures.

The American public—Protestant, Jew and Catholic—is rising, thank God, to determined action to put a stop to productions that, for the sake of monetary greed, debauch the sense of America's moral decency which until recently neither stage nor screen would dare offend as openly and as flagrantly as at present.

The moral forces of the nation, hoping that the motion picture producers would see the practical wisdom of cleaning their own house, have been too patient, tolerant, and long-suffering with offensive productions. Some years ago I sent to the National Motion Picture Congress a plea for censorship from within the industry. Many others, I am sure, interested in the motion picture as an invaluable educational, cultural, entertaining agency for good, have been protesting in vain against the ever growing degradation and perversion of the screen.

The Catholic Church takes no drab view of lawful pleasure. She is a mother of joy and limits her penitential season to some few weeks of the year, even interrupting it with an outburst of gladness. She rejoices in seeing her children happy, smiling in the enjoyment of normal, reasonable and wholesome amusement. Gladly would the Church bless the screen were it to be morally clean in its presentation of the realities of life and its creation of mirth-provoking situations.

Reform, restriction and suppression that would deprive the people of legitimate pleasure are not in contemplation. What is to be condemned as reprehensible—and justly so—is the glorification of crime, lust, and, in general, the serious violation of the law of God and man in things sacred to home and society.

Public safety demands that we establish quarantine against epidemic, enforce measures against unsanitary conditions, and guard our water supply lest contagion, infection and contamination harm the physical well-being of our people. To be consistent, we should be equally concerned about the general moral tone of the nation. A serious lowering of the moral standards of any community menaces the common good and weakens, if it does not destroy, the sanctions that guarantee peace and prosperity.

Civilization would not long endure were we a race of physical giants but dwarfed morally. The true ideal of any nation must be based on the properly balanced physical, intellectual, moral and spiritual life of the people. History records the inevitable ruin of nation after nation when moral laws are violated and spiritual ideals vanish. Evil motion pictures in their baneful influence undermine the moral foundation of the State.

Another serious consideration suggests the question why certain producers of motion pictures are permitted to counteract, to put it mildly, the influence of public and private schools which spend millions and millions annually for the education and the formation of character of the young. Dr. Campbell, our superintendent of schools, impressively writes:

There is little doubt in my mind that much of the good that the schools are doing, especially in the field of character training and the development of right social attitudes, is being undermined and even thwarted by sub-standard motion pictures.

The motion picture is more potent in impressionable and compelling effect on people of all classes than all our other refining and educational agencies. The American people, therefore, have a right to look for productions that are clean, safe, elevating and wholesome in their theme and method of entertainment.

Were the mothers of America aroused to the necessity of protecting their children from the moral defilement that lurks in every depraved motion picture, they would shun the place that presents it as they would avoid with horror a pest-house.

### GEORGE CARDINAL MUNDELEIN

#### Archbishop of Chicago

*From a statement issued on June 5, 1934.*

FOR several years I have been interested—and deeply concerned as well—in the growth and progress of the motion picture industry. I recognized the great possibilities it possessed both for entertainment and for education, and repeatedly have I said that in proper hands it would prove to be as great a discovery as was the printing press.

With this in view, I cooperated with others some four years ago in drawing up the moral code that was proposed to all the producing concerns in California, which was to be carefully observed in the production of all pictures made by them and shown in the motion picture houses of the country.

This moral code was unanimously accepted and solemnly signed by all the producers, and we felt that a great step forward had been taken to make the motion picture safe and enjoyable to all classes of people. We thought we were dealing with intelligent gentlemen. We were mistaken; to the most of them it was just another scrap of paper.

As a result, it is no exaggeration to say that in the last few years there has been no other medium or agency that has exercised so debasing an effect on public morals as the pictures, and the publicity that have come forth from Hollywood, the center of the motion picture industry.

Numberless pictures have been shown in the theaters of the country which serve no other purpose than to make a base appeal to a prurient taste, with results that are always pernicious. Sin is made to appear attractive and rampant, vice is presented as the acceptable thing. The criminal spirit is developed and encouraged and the virtues of chastity and honesty are scoffed at as outmoded practices belonging to a past and forgotten era.

True it is that many wholesome and enjoyable as well as artistic pictures are produced, and it would be absurd to say that these are not patronized and approved by the public. Only too often, however, is a picture that is otherwise acceptable, marred by the injection of a suggestive scene or incident or double meaning expression, inserted by some stupid director with the view of swelling the receipts of the box office.

All thinking people holding posts of responsibility have long since felt that some restraining influence, some censorship of morals, must be brought to hold the picture industry from running wild and creating untold harm on the future life and character of our people. Particularly is this true of the Catholic clergy and their bishops. Ours has never been a narrow attitude where the entertainment and recreation of our people has been concerned.

Even with the stage, bad as it is, we have not cried out in protest, but let each man's and woman's conscience pass sentence, for these are of age, they can judge what is right and what is wrong. Not so with the moving pictures; a large portion of the audience is made up of children, with tender consciences, impressionable minds, dormant passions, characters still in formation.

We Catholics have built up a school system that has cost many millions of dollars and entails countless sacrifices for the sole purpose of training the spiritual and moral, as well as the intellectual side of these children. Our people would accuse us, their spiritual leaders, of cowardice if we supinely stood by and allowed any influence, such as that exercised by the salacious moving pictures of today, to menace and destroy in the souls of the little children that which we and they have built up in our schools.

It is for that reason, if for no other, that we must disagree with those that contend that moving pictures should be free from censorship or regulation from without.

As a result, when the bishops of the United States, representing twenty million Catholics, met in Washington last fall, the question of how best to counteract the menace of indecency in motion pictures received the gravest consideration.

A committee of bishops, with the Archbishop of Cincinnati as its head, was appointed to study the question and to advise us what measures each one of us was to take in combating what we consider a poisonous infection threatening our children's faith and morals. They have mapped out a nation-wide campaign; some of the smaller dioceses have already taken open action.

In the larger centers, like Chicago, the preliminary work is begun, to make all realize the gravity of the situation. The permanent organization coming later, will require constant vigilance and systematic, persistent, and concerted action on our part which will demonstrate its effectiveness in refusal to patronize theaters which continue to exhibit indecent and debasing pictures.

Our desires, our intention, our purpose is not to destroy the moving picture but to reform it; we have no wish to deprive the people of legitimate recreation, but to make them insist upon wholesome entertainment for themselves and their children.

Catholics are bound in conscience to avoid the occasions of sin. Consequently, attendance at these corrupting pictures constitutes a grave offense against the moral law. Mothers, in whose keeping is the unspoiled childhood of today, should be the valiant women who will not allow the cinema to destroy the innocence of youth.

**THE MOST REV. MAURICE F. McAULIFFE****Bishop of Hartford**

*Pastoral Letter dated July 11, 1934.*

**T**HE bishops of the United States, at their annual conference in Washington, thought it proper and imperative to arouse by their concerted action, not only Catholics, but all those interested in the well-being of the country, to a fuller realization of the deadly menace of many of the motion picture shows today.

The films are an outrage to decency, morals and religion. The themes of these motion pictures are usually divorce, illicit love, marital infidelity and gangster crimes. They attack the personal purity of life and the sanctity of the home and ridicule the religious sanction of the moral law and obedience to lawful authority. When they are not totally bad they are suggestive and pander insidiously to the lowest passions of human nature. They are a menace to the home and society.

The Federal Office of Education in Washington reports on motion pictures in education in the United States, as follows:

That seventy million persons are estimated to attend motion picture performances every week in this country; that on an average each child in areas where motion pictures are physically available, goes to the movies once a week; that three out of four of the pictures shown relate to sex, crime or romantic love; that the child retains two-thirds as much as the adult from his attendance at the movies and that motion pictures change children's attitude and these changes have a lasting influence.

If we are to maintain right standards of life, preserve the innocence of our children, and protect them in their growing years, a relentless war must be waged against this orgy of filth and indecency. Parents are admonished of their responsibility and accountability before God for the proper supervision of their children. They are reminded of the words of the Savior "He that shall scandalize one of these little ones that believe in Me, it were better for him that a millstone should be hanged about his neck and that he should be drowned in the depths of the sea." (Matthew, 18-6.)

I appeal to our Catholic people and request them to refrain from patronizing theaters where indecent pictures are shown. Their whole-hearted cooperation in this vital matter will insure success. The Legion of Decency will be inaugurated July fifteenth, in every parish in the Diocese. Pledge cards will be distributed under the direction of the Pastor who will make a report of the number, monthly, to the Chancery Office. Let every Catholic register his protest against unclean entertainment and indecent pictures. Let him stay away until the motion picture industry is rid of its current evils. Let him enlist his neighbor of whatever creed, to do the same. The Law of God, the morality of the nation, our national honor and integrity, the innocence of our little children, the fair name of womanhood, and virile manhood are the issues.

### THE MOST REV. JAMES A. GRIFFIN

Bishop of Springfield in Illinois

*Pastoral Letter dated May 31, 1934.*

**T**HE Episcopal Committee on Motion Pictures, speaking and acting for the Hierarchy, have issued a call for Catholic Action.

This call for Catholic Action, along very definite lines, affects every man, woman and child in the United States today—yes and shall affect millions yet unborn.

This call for Catholic Action will re-act on every man, woman and child in our Country, no matter to what church they may belong.

This call for Catholic Action, is a call to all God-fearing, America-loving people, to help save the rising generation—our boys and girls—our young men and women, whether non-Catholic or Catholic.

Those boys and girls—those young men and women, will be the fathers and the mothers—the business and professional leaders of tomorrow.

They must be saved for God's sake, for their own sake, for our country's sake, and for their children's children sake.

Saved from what? Saved from the rising, surging tide of moral filth and putrid degeneracy now so brazenly, so

insidiously and so diabolically exuded from and through the movies.

This call to Catholic Action to save our people, especially our young, innocent boys and girls, from such a menace, with all its untold implications, is worthy and deserving of our and your best efforts.

The campaign, now being inaugurated in various parts of the country, must and shall be extended to every diocese and parish in America.

This campaign must not and, please God, shall not cease till the object sought shall have been triumphantly realized—a thorough-going clean-up of the Motion Picture business.

The producers, the manufacturers, of those poison pictures are watching the progress of this campaign, and they are nervously watching their box receipts.

They are transmuting filth into box receipts! They are slaughtering the innocents of America for filthy lucre, through their putrid movies.

This campaign must not cease and there must be no let-up in this holy crusade for clean pictures till the purpose of this campaign shall have been realized.

Should this campaign fail, which God forbid, then well may the producers of filthy pictures laugh at us—and then too, may we well expect to see even more putrid pictures follow.

Note well, we say "Producers" and not local distributors! The local theater owner is often the victim of the producers "Blind Booking" system.

Our Diocese, as usual in all good works, will go the whole way in helping make this campaign a complete success.

Kindly read this letter at all Masses next Sunday and also add your own earnest words of encouragement.

Get the children of your parish back of this program and victory is yours.

The good Sisters in your school, even in a vacation school if you have no parochial school, can and will work wonders in getting the boys and girls to sign the pledge of the Legion of Decency—and what is more enthruse them to work all summer against the indecent cinema.

In a word, Father, I exhort you to get your people, young and old, to sign the Pledge—and keep it.

Distribute these Pledges next Sunday, urge your people to sign up during the week and then report to you.

Within a reasonable time, say within a week or so, send to our Chancery Office the number of Pledges signed. We will need the signed Pledges for further use in this campaign.

A few words on the Pledge every now and then will keep this flame of fervor burning brightly and will assure complete victory—victory for youth, victory for home life, victory for our country and for religion.

You will please form for this Legion of Decency a committee taken from the heads of the various societies in your parish. This committee could meet and discuss with you what further action should be taken against this frightful abuse of the cinema.

### THE MOST REV. FRANCIS C. KELLEY

Bishop of Oklahoma City and Tulsa

*Pastoral Letter dated June 10, 1934.*

NEWS has already been given, through the religious and secular press, of the campaign inaugurated by the American bishops against indecent and immoral moving pictures. I have good reason to believe that, although this campaign has scarcely passed the information stage, it has nevertheless not been without effect, especially in the populous dioceses of the East and North. I would have made an attempt long ago to stop the havoc wrought on public morals in this Diocese by indecent moving pictures, were it not for the fact that, since all of them come from a single source, Hollywood, local exhibitors have had little to say about the productions supplied them, and also because the number of persons who might here lend their aid would, relative to the Catholic population in the whole country, be considered of minor importance. Nothing I could have done alone in a small diocese would have had great influence. Now that this matter has been taken up by the whole body of American bishops, and that other agencies concerned for the public welfare are showing live interest, there is no reason why we should not make a strong effort to force reform. The affair, too, has gotten beyond consideration

for individuals. The most friendly act we could do the exhibitors, as well as the public, is to help save them all from the sin of cooperating with the seemingly conscienceless few who control the output of moving pictures.

And the campaign of the American bishops aims at helping rather than hurting. The bishops recognize the educational possibilities of moving pictures, as well as the need of the people for recreation; but the producers have forgotten everything except financial returns. The entire moving picture business is on a mere money basis. No thought is given to possibilities for good in motion pictures, in the face of possibilities for enriching a select few. So the movies have become a menace, not only to religion, but to the ideal of American citizenship.

There are few people on earth more expressive in their patriotism than ours. Beginning in the schools, public and private, and passing on through such agencies as scouts, societies, sodalities, as well as social, commercial and professional clubs for both men and women, the note of patriotism never ceases to be sounded loud and clear in American life. The moving picture situation, however, makes one wonder if we have not, in all this enthusiasm, failed to note implications of duty. War succeeds in bringing down from the clouds that saving rain of vigilance upon which the continued safety of the nation must depend; but there is more danger to our ideals in the immorality and crime fostered by the majority of the moving pictures shown to youth than from any war. Patriotism requires that a stop be put to this danger, for patriotism is not an occasional virtue to be used now and then to rekindle great fires of enthusiasm, but a steady, quiet glow on the hearthstones of our homes, as well as in the hearts of our people. It should not alone call for the testimony of a few cheers on holidays. It is essentially a vigilant and constant guard over something worth guarding. It is a noble sentiment worth defending everywhere and at all times.

When I mention homes I am not expressing a passing bit of sentiment to round out a sentence. I could easily afford to barter all my sentences for that one word. Practical patriotism can sometimes afford to ignore even the public machinery that represents the State to the citizen, if only it concerns itself with the foundation without which neither

the machinery nor the State can exist. That foundation is the home. But, like the foundation of a great building, the home is often forgotten. The structure erected upon it we see and admire, but we ignore only too often what holds that structure unshakable and solid.

The Church, however, never fails to think first of the foundation for she keeps the importance of the home constantly before us. And not alone because of the deposit of Faith she possesses, but because, in her long years of experience, she has seen the causes that brought about the fall as well as the rise of nations. While the causes for their rise may often be a matter of dispute, there can be no dispute as to the cause of their fall. It has been nearly always the undermining of the strength of the people through immorality and luxury. Thinking of her duty in terms of individual souls, as she does, yet the Church cannot ignore the influence on these of the family which is the unit of society—of the home.

Why then, since all that I have said readily will be admitted by everybody, do men and women, loving their country, faithful in practice to their religious ideals, not see that such love and faithfulness implies a stern duty of vigilance over the chief interests of the home, over the living reasons for its existence, the children who grow up beneath its roof? I challenge the patriotism, and I accuse of criminal indifference, parents who are blind to this duty. In this letter I am purposely leaving in a second place higher and holier motives for vigilance over the lives of the young, so that my words may be weighed even by those who have not given such higher and holier motives the attention they deserve. I accuse my fellow citizens, even as citizens and as citizens only, of permitting a handful of men, influenced exclusively by a desire for profit, to teach lewdness and crime to their children. And I do this, deliberately selecting my words and careful of the meaning I intend them to convey. The moving picture industry, judged by its product and its product alone, is like a city ruled without conscience. I go even further and say that the maudlin admiration given to the divorce-smeared heroes and heroines of the screen, an admiration that sets aside the greatest figures in history and life, is undermining patriotism. We may never forget flag exercises in schools and orations on national holidays, but

these do not impress the young to anything like the extent that hero worship for frivolous and often shameless movie actors and actresses do. I cannot but wonder too at the gross laxity of religious parents, who permit the minds of their children to play in the filth carefully placed for their contagion at so much a film foot. Can religious-minded parents enjoy the thought that these screen heroes and heroines, whose escapades are almost daily chronicled in the press, have often a greater influence over their children at the formative period of life than the God Who created them, and the parents who brought them into the world? Can patriotic citizens wish to supplant Washington to whom we are indebted for our liberty, or the Lincoln to whom we are indebted for our national unity, with heroes and heroines whose short day of influence has no glory worth a moment's admiration?

The remedy is clearly indicated. While the exhibitors have the right to reject about five per cent of their block bookings, there is little sign that they use that right to keep filthy pictures out of sight. The producers themselves hear no music but that of clinking coins. The whole industry centers around the dollar. Keeping that dollar until producers especially learn a lesson is one argument that will be understood and effective. Promises made through the Hays organization have not been kept. *The very code of decency which the producers themselves adopted has been completely forgotten.* A blow at the pocket book need not be mortal, but it is likely to be effective.

The film producers answer all protests with one set phrase: "The public wants them dirty." How near right are they? Have we a public so morally degraded as to demand the filth it is getting? I do not think so. Yet if the producers judge from present-day laxity of speech they have had some reasons for believing that they really are giving the public what it wants. Let there be an examination of conscience, especially by men, on the growing habit amongst them of indecent talk. Those who would pass as persons of education and refinement should remember that culture does not grow on a dung-hill. To any public and general effort to bring about better conditions should be joined earnest individual efforts to remove an excuse of producers based upon present-day laxity in speech.

I hereby direct that the Legion of Decency, organized and fostered by other American bishops, be promoted in this diocese. I direct the pastors to have copies of the pledge, which is attached to this letter, made and signed as widely as possible. This pledge does not forbid attendance at the moving picture theater when unobjectionable films are exhibited. I ask my people to join and support the Legion of Decency by signing its pledge and keeping it. I further direct pastors not only to read this letter to their flocks, but to speak to them on the subject many times, constantly reminding them of their duty. I direct that warnings be made, particularly to parents, who are to be kept reminded of the obligations of their state; and furthermore I direct that, when the schools again open, pastors and teachers enlist the powerful influence of the pupils themselves in a Childrens' Crusade of Decency, so that, if parents forget or are careless in such a vital matter, they may be reminded by the ideals expressed by innocent and devoted childhood. It is notorious that children may be enlisted to do, out of a spirit of generosity and self-sacrifice, what grown men and women would hesitate even to attempt.

### THE BISHOPS' COMMITTEE

*Statement issued by Archbishop McNicholas on June 27, 1934.*

**D**URING the past several months, the Catholic Bishops' Committee on Motion Pictures, in cooperation with authorities of all the dioceses of the country, has been waging a campaign of protest against the destructive moral influence of evil motion pictures.

There has been no wish to harm nor destroy the motion picture business. But the evil character of portions of many motion pictures, and the low standards of some motion pictures, have forced the bishops to take direct and aggressive action in safeguarding the moral well-being of their people.

These recent activities against motion pictures which offend decency and morality were launched only after years of vain hope that the producers of these pictures would realize the harm being done and take positive steps to correct the trend.

The Committee is not hostile to the entertainment busi-

ness. In fact, it recognizes entertainment as a virtual necessity in modern life. But such entertainment must be of a wholesome character, and to that objective the Committee has earnestly addressed its efforts.

The Legion of Decency, whose members pledge themselves not to patronize theaters showing offensive films, has gathered to its banner many thousands of adherents wherever it has been introduced. Plans are being developed to extend its membership to every town and city in the United States and to invite all persons in sympathy with its purpose to lend their support.

The Committee has been informed that, through the loyal cooperation of our Catholic people, together with a widespread response on the part of many others who believe that a purification of the cinema is an outstanding moral issue of the day, the motion picture theaters have suffered a severe curtailment of patronage. This curtailment has prompted the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, Inc., to send Mr. Martin Quigley, of New York City, and Mr. Joseph I. Breen, of Hollywood, to the meeting of the Episcopal Committee today.

The companies which are members of the above-named organization are reputed to be responsible for ninety per cent of the films produced in the United States. These companies are: R.-K.-O. Picture Corporation, Fox Film Corporation, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Corporation, Paramount Pictures Corporation, Warner Brothers, First National Pictures Corporation, Columbia Pictures Corporation, Hal Roach, Educational Pictures, Inc., Universal Pictures Corporation, United Artists, Inc., Walter Disney Productions, Pathe, Inc., Principal Pictures, Inc.

The representatives of the Association submitted a proposal covering certain specific revisions of the industry's plan of self-regulation.

The Committee has been pleased to receive these representatives and to learn from them of the renewed efforts toward enforcement of the industry's plan of self-regulation, effective as of July 1, 1934, which has been decided upon. The Committee is informed that the producers' jury in Hollywood, a part of the original machinery for enforcement of the production code, which was adopted in April, 1930, has been abandoned and that additional local authority has been

assigned to the code administration, which administration is to be given an amplified personnel. In the past, the producers' jury has functioned ineffectively.

The final responsibility for the character of the motion pictures to be issued by the organized industry has been accepted by the Board of Directors of the organized industry. The court of last resort in the settlement of any disputes which may arise between the studios and the code administration will be this Board of Directors.

The Episcopal Committee views with favor the renewed efforts of the organized industry to discharge its responsibility of issuing only such motion pictures as may conform with reasonable moral standards. The Committee believes that the production code, if given enforcement, will materially and constructively influence the character of screen entertainment. Hence it is disposed to render encouragement and cooperation to these efforts, which it hopes will achieve the promised results.

Our Catholic people, however, are counselled that in the long run the desired results of a wholesome screen can be assured only through unflinching opposition to evil motion pictures. The widespread interest in and loyal support of our campaign of protest must be maintained in order that the producers of motion pictures may constantly be aware of the demand for clean entertainment. The salacious and otherwise objectionable type of motion picture must be avoided.

The Episcopal Committee hopes that the results of the organized industry's renewed efforts looking toward adequate moral improvement in the pictures shown. And thus it is hoped that the Catholic bishops may be relieved of what otherwise will be the imperative necessity of continuing indefinitely and of extending the campaign of protest.

In the issue of THE CATHOLIC MIND for September 8th, will be carried Pastorals and Statements by other Archbishops and Bishops on the evil motion pictures and the Legion of Decency.